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#### CHAPTER I.—WOMAN'S WILES.

How it swept along the Kentish fields, driving the snow into drifts, whistling through the bare branches of the trees, and hurrying the black clouds along in the lowering sky!

The mail train was speeding along to Dover, and the passengers, blinking out of the windows, shrugged their shoulders and shivered at the prospect before them.

"If it's like this inland," said one prosperous-looking old gentleman, tucked up in rugs in the corner of a first-class compartment, to his opposite neighbor, "what will it be like at Dover? Ten to one the boat won't cross to-night!"

At the further end of the carriage a young man was sitting, who seemed much disturbed by this remark.

"Do you really think so?" he asked anxiously, joining in the talk for the first time. "It takes a great deal to stop the mail boat."

The first speaker replied with the calm and pensive assurance of an experienced traveler.

"Well, and what do you call 'a great deal,' if you haven't got it there?"

And he pointed with his finger to the snow-covered landscape just as a fresh blast came howling round the flying train, covering the window with a thick white sheet of driving snow.

The young man looked more anxious than ever. He was a clerk in the employ of a firm of stock brokers, and had been intrusted for the first time with a duty of great importance. He was the bearer of a large amount of negotiable securities which, for safety, it was thought advisable to send by hand, and he had to deliver them in Paris on the following day.

When the train stopped at Dover station, therefore, George Llewellyn, for that was the young fellow's name, was among the first of the passengers to spring on to the platform, and to ask eagerly whether the mail boat was going to cross.



THE DETECTIVE CAME UP TO HIM.

"No, sir. She won't cross to-night. The storm's too high," was the disappointing answer of the official.

Llewellyn, however, would not give up hope at once. He had no luggage but his hand bag, and he waited about, refusing all offers of the porters to carry it for him, and made further inquiries in the vain hope of at length hearing better news.

At last he became aware that something about him had made him an object of suspicion to two men whom, by their boots, he guessed to be detectives; and, recognizing this, he was about to leave the station, one of these men came up to him very quietly and requested him to step into the superintendent's office.

Llewellyn saw that it was best to comply quietly, and, on finding himself shut in with the detective and a couple of policemen in uniform, he gave at once the fullest details as to his name, his residence, his place of employment, and his present errand.

He also gave up his keys, so that the detective could inspect the documents he was carrying.

The examination lasted a very few moments. "Quite right, sir, thank you," said the man, touching his hat with a smile, "and now you must excuse me for having detained you, but we've just had a wire telling us to be on the lookout for two well-known thieves, a man and a woman, who are supposed to have come down by this train with a number of stolen securities. So you see, sir, although it was a bad shot in one way to suspect you, on the other it was a good one, for you were traveling with securities, although they didn't happen to be stolen ones."

George Llewellyn accepted the apology and explanation good-humoredly and asked if it was by order of the police that the boat was stopped.

"Oh, no, sir. The weather's responsible for that," answered the man, shaking his head. "Though I don't say it won't help us to have a little more time to look around."

And he opened the door, saluting George respectfully as the latter passed out.

Out in the little squalid street outside the station, with the wind whistling round the corners and the snow melting into a dirty slush at his feet, Llewellyn asked himself what he should do. Should he put up at a hotel in the town? Or should he make his way to the house of an old friend of his father's, who lived, as he knew, a little way out of Dover, off the high road over the cliffs?

He decided on the latter course. Dr. Lowe was not a man who kept early hours, and George, who remembered in what direction the house lay although he had not been there since his boyhood, decided that he would be able to reach it in an hour, allowing for the state of the weather.

It was by this time twenty-five minutes past ten o'clock, and the snow was

falling less thickly. It did occur to Llewellyn that the expedition had its risks, considering the value of the property he was carrying, but on the other hand a night spent at a hotel was not without its dangers in the circumstances. So George, who was young, tall, muscular, and provided with a revolver, started on his way through the town.

He could hear the roar of the waves as they broke upon the beach; he had to fight against the wind when he reached the corner of the street. But on the whole the walk, for a strong young man, had its pleasures, for the snow had ceased to be blinding, and a battle with the wind stirred young blood into pleasurable excitement. In a very short time he had got clear of the town, and was on the high road in the open country.

Here the snow impeded his progress more than he had expected; for there was nothing in this high bleak spot to check the caprices of the wind, which swept almost bare great patches of the open land, and whirled the snow into heaps in unexpected places. It was a lonely walk enough, and George began to be puzzled as to whether he was keeping the right way. There were so few hedges or trees, and the featureless character of the country made it easy for the snow to blur its outlines until they were quite undistinguishable.

He felt rather relieved when he caught the sound of human voices. He waited, as they seemed to be behind him. He heard them again in the roar of the wind. He halted the unseen persons, but then the voices ceased. He presently went on again until he was startled to see in the darkness between him and the sea the dim outlines of two figures keeping pace with him at a little distance. He halted them again, and the figures promptly vanished.

Without giving way to any cowardly fears George began to wish that he had been more discreet and that he had stayed at a hotel. There was nothing to do now, however, but to go forward as quickly and carefully as he could, for more than two-thirds of the distance must have been traversed by this time.

Unfortunately, however, soon after this incident he lost his way hopelessly, undeniably. He found himself floundering, knee-deep, in snow, over something which might be a freshly-plowed field or which might be the ruins of a house, but which was certainly not the open road.

After a few fruitless struggles to get on firmer ground George again caught sight, a little way to the left this time, of two figures, which he perceived to be those of a man and a woman. Just at the moment of his discerning them the figures parted, that of the man disappearing from view, while the woman held on her way.

As she was evidently on firm ground, George made towards her at once, not calling out, lest he should frighten her.

Before he came up with her, he saw, by her walk and by her figure, that she was young; and when he addressed her, saying that he had lost his way, she turned her head quickly, and showed him that she was adorably pretty. So entirely was he thrown off his balance by the unexpected sight of such a lovely face, that he stopped short in the middle of his speech, and left her to answer a question which he had not finished asking.

"You are on the high road—to St. Phœnix," she said, quickly. "Keep straight on."

And then she glanced, with a sudden change of expression, at the bag he was carrying. Before he could do more than raise his hat and thank her, she had hurried past him like a hare, with just one more look, penetrating, intelligent, from his face to the bag in his hand.

George remained for a moment stupefied; he stared at the retreating figure before him, and fancied he saw her turn, with a gesture of invitation to him to follow and catch her up. Acting on the impression, he started forward, and then there flashed into his mind the words used by the detective at the station: "Two well-known thieves, a man and a woman," had traveled down by the same train as himself. He was at once ashamed of his momentary suspicion that the beautiful girl he had just spoken to could be anything but the angel she looked; but her furtive and eager glances at his bag recurred again and again to his mind.

The wind was still blowing very hard, and the snow, which had for some time almost ceased, began to fall again in great flakes, so that the landscape was soon entirely blotted out from view, and George found more difficulty than ever in keeping the road.

At last he saw a large, dark object in front of him, which he recognized as the clump of trees which marked the spot where there were crossroads, and where he should have to take the road on his right to get down into the village, where Dr. Lowe's house stood.

The crossroads were at the highest point of the neighborhood, and George could scarcely keep his feet, much less choose his way as he approached it.

Just before he reached the turning he came to a fair-sized house of only two stories, shut in by a garden inclosed by a high wall. Just as George got under shelter of the wall, a door in the middle opened, and out of the darkness the voice of the girl he had just met spoke to him.

"You will never find your way into the village through this snow. Won't you come inside the house until it has left off a little?"

George stopped. He could hardly see the girl's pretty face in the darkness and the blinding snow; but the voice was alluring in its sweetness, and the

temptation to look once more upon such exceptional beauty as hers decided him.

"Thank you. It is very good of you, very good of you, indeed. If I am not intruding, I shall indeed be glad to accept your kind offer for a few minutes."

She stepped nimbly back, opening the door for him. He passed through on to a stone-flagged path, which led, under cover all the way, to a deep porch, under which the lamplight streamed brightly and invitingly through the open door.

The curtains of a large window on the right of the porch were drawn; but those on the left were still open, and allowed George to see into a dining-room made cozy by the shaded light of lamps, and by the glow of a bright



HE CAME TO A FAIR-SIZED HOUSE.

fire. He caught glimpses of armor, helmets, spears, shields, shining on a dark rich wall; and of flowers and sparkling silver on a white-covered table.

George, who was half-dazed by his struggle with the wind and by the action of the snow upon his eyes, thought vaguely of the story of "Beauty and the Beast," as he staggered up the stone path. There was something mysterious, almost uncanny about the shut-in house and its curiously hospitable inhabitant, which made him change his mind as he realized it, and turn with an excuse upon his lips to go out again.

At that moment he heard a key turned in the door by which he had come, and he knew in a moment that he had done wrong in entering. He made two rapid steps back, and was met by the young girl.

"This way," she said, as, passing him quickly with a smile of invitation on her face, she led the way into the hall.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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